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1946

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Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
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NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"The Winter's Tale"

The New York Times

JANUARY 16, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The Theatre Guild Shakespearean Company made its bow to New York last evening by offering a production of "The Winter's Tale" at the Cort. Not one of the Bard's best plays, it is seldom revived; for the first journey, the Guild's group goes on what is to all intents and purposes a voyage of discovery. On the whole, the trip is successful. "The Winter's Tale" never will be "Hamlet," but the current production makes interesting and generally alive a play which normally reclines only on the library shelf. The Guild's company has started in the right way.

* * *

Being near the end of the book, "The Winter's Tale" has been slighted, and probably even Professor Kittredge's students went over it with only forced draft and lightly. It is about the King of Sicilia who suddenly mistrusts his wife, not with encouragement such as supplied by Iago in "Othello," but for no reason. The first part is melodrama; the heir dies, the queen is reported dead, the king sends away the daughter he thinks is not his. Then comes the broken back of the plot. Sixteen years later the daughter, brought up by a shepherd, is in love with the son of the King of Bohemia, who had been charged as lover in the earlier affair. Melodrama turns to comedy — and it is, in truth, not Shakespeare's best play.

But in working out the present version, the Guild's architects—B. Iden Payne and Romney Brent, directors, plus Lawrence Langner—have cut away dead wood and have arranged so that the play's various scenes run smoothly and coherently. No one ever will say that Shakespeare did not create similar characters much better in other plays, but no one will deny 'the Winters' Tale" does not here make them as clear as possible. An exception may be taken to the shepherds' dance in the play's second half, but probably even that is no worse than harmless. As directors, the Messrs. Payne and Brent have striven to have their players speak naturally, and to offer their tale not on the ground that it is a classic but as two hours and a half in the theatre.

The players are in line with the production. They probably are no Shakespearean models for the ages, but on the other hand there are few who supply a jarring note. Henry Daniell is Leontes. He is believable and easy, he speaks distinctly and while he cannot overcome the fact the King's sudden rage is inexplicable, he carries majesty beyond that point. Florence Reed is as usual full of fire; she is the Paulina who dares to defend the Queen. Jessie Royce Landis plays the part of the Queen well enough; Colin Keith-Johnston is an earnest, honest Camillo. Whitford Kane, who usually is the grave-digger for "Hamlet," is the shepherd, and he well knows his Shakespeare. Mr. Brent, as the actor, is perhaps a bit coy and bouncing as the rogue. The part of Perdita, the young girl, is played by Geraldine Stroock. Stewart Chaney's setting are simple, which is best, and his costumes are right.

'THE WINTER'S TALE.'

Play by William Shakespeare; directed by B. Iden Payne and Romney Brent; settings and costumes by Stewart Chaney; production supervised by Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn; presented by the Theatre Guild Shakespearean Company at the Cort Theatre, Tuesday evening, January 15, 1946. The cast:

Prologue	Romney Brent
Archidamus	Maury Yaffe
Camillo	Colin Keith-Johnston
Polixenes	David Powell
Leontes	Henry Daniell
Hermione	Jessie Royce Landis
Mamillius	Judson Rees
1st Lady	Denise Flynn
2nd Lady	Lucille Patton
3d Lady	Jennifer Howard
1st Lord	Baldwin McGaw
Antigonus	Charles Francis
2nd Lord	Lionel Ince
3rd Lord	Frank Leslie
Paulina	Florence Reed
4th Lord	Jules Racine
Keeper of the Jail	Guy Arbury
Emilia	Genevieve Frizzell
Cleomenes	Charles Atkin
Dion	Philip Huston
Old Shepherd	Whitford Kane
Clown, his son	Kurt Richards
Time	Philip Huston
Autolycus	Romney Brent
Florizel	Robert Duke
Perdita	Geraldine Stroock
Dorcas	Jo Van Fleet
Mopsa	Helen Wagner
Servant	Victor Beecroft
Dancing Ram	James Starbuck
Dancing Ewe	Lili Mann
Dancing Horsemen	Francis Burnell, Jules Racine

Journal my American

JANUARY 16, 1946

'The Winter's Tale' Opens at the Cort

By ROBERT GARLAND

This is a rave review of a great play by a great playwright, of a great performance by a great cast, of a great production by a great producer. The great playwright is William Shakespeare. The great cast is headed by Florence Reed, Jessie Royce Landis, Henry Daniell, Whitford Kane, Romney Brent, Colin Keith-Johnston and Philip Huston. The great producer is The Theatre Guild.

And that's the new production of "The Winter's Tale," to be seen and heard at the Cort Theatre. Under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner, with direction by Iden Payne and Mr. Brent, with settings and costumes by Stewart Chaney, an ageless "comedy" is its ageless self again.

Of late we've had Paul Robeson's "Othello," Margaret Webster's "The Tempest" and Maurice Evans' "Hamlet." Each, after its fashion, has been grand. But The Theatre Guild, with its new Shakespearean company, has brought us William Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale." Now, in 48th st., the big name is the usually neglected name of the dramatist. That, too, is grand!

In a prologue, spoken by Romney Brent and credited to no one, the tenor of coming events is made quite clear. Here's a comedy, a winter's tale, a theatre-piece to pass the frosty hours. Its author is William Shakespeare. Its actors will do their best to please you. Ring up the curtain. Let Archidamus speak...

"If you shall chance, Camillo—"

* *

Three Way Review

There're two accepted ways to write a review of last night's revival. One is to rewrite Clayton Hamilton's customary Sunday article. This will tell you what William Shakespeare had in mind when he fabricated "The Winter's Tale" more than 300 years ago. Or what Mr. Hamilton, from his fireside fastness at The Players, thinks Williiam Shakespeare had in mind. This will get us nowhere.

The other way is to reminisce at second-hand about the unequalled Hermione of Mary Anderson, the unforgettable Hermione of Viola Allen and the unequalled and unforgettable Hermione of Edith Wynne Mathison. Then, waxing historical, it is pointed out that New York first saw "The Winter's Tale" in 1795. As "Florizel and Perdita."

Ignoring both the one way and the other, it is more seemly to report that, at the Cort William Shakespeare's next-to-last play has returned to town as the comedy, tragedy, melodrama, romance and pot-boiler it actually is. When I saw it last September in Wilmington, it was a little on the stuffy side, thanks to Iden Payne's Avonian direction. Now it is nothing of the kind.

Now, with redirection by the un-Avonian Romney Brent, it gets a truly Elizabethan move on. Once again the greatest playwright of them all makes a study of jealousy, that "magnifier of trifles," that "hydra of calamities," that "most unbecoming of afflictions," Leontes, the King, versus the Tyrant of the Mind...

"Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy—"

* * *

'Hit,' Shakespeare

As one who never saw Mary Anderson, who doesn't remember Viola Allen and who didn't care for Edith Wynne Mathison, the Hermione of Jessie Royce Landis is the Hermione of her creator. Beautiful and warm, loyal in her unreasonable green-eyed persecution, it is a characterization of which any living actress might be proud. Dead actresses might have profited by it, too.

When I go on to say that the Paulina of Florence Reed is superb, I mean that the Paulina of Florence Reed is superb. It has every right to be! And, still harping on the ladies, the Perdita of Geraldine Stroock is Hermione's natural daughter. Her final meeting with her mother is a thing of great actorial beauty.

The men are also worthy. As Leontes, Henry Daniell brings believability to an almost unbelievable role. David Powell is a handsomely motivating Polixenes. Colin Keith-Johnston is a rightfully brooding Camillo. Philip Huston doubles effectively as Lord Dion and Father Time. And Romney Brent is the life of the sheep-shearing party as Autolycus, the rogue who picks a pretty pocket.

With fluent direction by Mr. Payne and Mr. Brent, with beautiful backgrounds and costumes by Stewart Chaney, with meticulous and imaginative supervision by Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner, with a great play by a great playwright, with a great performance by a great cast and with a great production by a great producer—

"A very palpable hit," this "Winter's Tale."

The Sun

JANUARY 16, 1946

'The Winter's Tale,' Presented at Cort, Lacks Smoothness, Sustained Vitality.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

They brought Shakespeare to town again last night and into the West 48th street block populated by white rabbits and glass animals—Shakespeare as represented by the long-neglected "The Winter's Tale," and it is a production that is by no means all it should be.

When the New York stage had its last real tussle with this mixture of melodrama and comedy the glorious but ill-fated New Theater made the presentation in 1910 at the big (the too big) opera house in Central Park West. Now the play is sponsored by the far-reaching Theater Guild and it comes into the Cort.

"The Winter's Tale," seen last night for the first time by all but a few not quite venerable playgoers, is a curiously divided play. The first half and by far the better portion as it seemed at the premiere performance, is given over to the fury of melodrama and the second to pastoral romance. In the loose direction and in the playing at the Cort the play comes forth as a rather straggling piece of theater. And the physical production is by no means an inspired one.

Shakespeare's fable of Sicilia and Bohemia, first produced in the theater of our town when the drama was flourishing in John street back in 1795, presents one of the most incredible of characters in the jealousy-wracked monarch, Leontes; one of the noblest of all heroines in Hermione, and certainly one of the most vexingly tiresome clowns in the rogue, Autolycus. "The Winter's Tale" may be a better play than "The Tempest" but it didn't seem so last night.

There are some good actors upon the stage of the Cort, but the company, as a whole, doesn't have too happy a time with "The Winter's Tale." It's barely possible that they are the wrong set of players. Henry Daniell is the Leontes, the self-deceived King of Sicilia, tormented by a causeless and senseless jealousy, who sends his chaste wife to prison, tries to poison the blameless Polixenes and banishes his own infant daughter to die in a cave. Daniell reads with clarity, but the role of the king is hardly his kind of part.

Jessie Royce Landis plays Hermione, a part cherished by such players as Mary Anderson, Viola Allen and Edith Wynne Matthison. Miss Landis succeeds in presenting much of the patience, the dignity, the distress and the majesty of the character and has the play's best scene when she defends herself at the trial, climaxed by the reading of the decision of the Delphic Oracle.

Florence Reed is an actress of extraordinary force whether she is playing the fiendish Mother Goddam or the sharp-spoken Paulina, her present role. Whitford Kane is characteristically affable as the old shepherd, foster-father of the abandoned Perdita. Romney Brent struggles vainly to put some fun into the chantings of Autolycus. Geraldine Stroock is charming, if inexperienced, as Perdita. There is some good reading from Colin Keith-Johnston as Camillo and David Powell as Polixenes. The costuming of Stewart Chaney is better than his settings.

"The Winter's Tale," in the production given it at the Cort, has some good scenes, particularly in the first half, but it lacks smoothness and the sustained vitality of good theater.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 16, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'The Winter's Tale' Takes Its Place with Bard's Best

It just goes to show you that the production makes the play. Until last night I had never seen Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale" enacted on the stage; and, having read it several times (as a required chore in school and later as penance for the sins of omission in my classical reading) I never wanted to see it. It could be an instrument of torture for sophomores, as far as I was concerned, and I thought it a happy dispensation that it had not been produced on Broadway for 40 years.

I recant, put on the hair-shirt and cover myself in ashes. For "The Winter's Tale," as the Theater Guild Shakespearean Company has presented it at the Booth, is a thing of utter magnificence.

It may have been sheer surprise that I should find "The Winter's Tale" vastly enjoyable instead of the bore I expected it to be; but my conviction, at the moment, is that I have never enjoyed a Shakespeare play, except the Barrymore "Hamlet," half as well. It enchanted my eyes. It made me weep. It enlivened my spirits with the sheep-shearing festival, choreography by William Bales and music by Anthony Bernard and Leo Russotto. It made me laugh in the comedy parts interpreted by Romney Brent, Whitford Kane, Kurt Richards, James Starbuck and Lili Mann.

This play has had 16 weeks on the road, which should be a lesson to producers who are too importunate about bringing their plays before the hypercritical eyes of New York first-nighters. For everything about this production runs as smooth as clockwork. There is no star in the show, and the eight featured players work as a perfect team.

Each one, indeed, is allowed his (or her) moment, or moments, of grace, to which all the others on stage contribute by keeping perfectly in character and yet throwing interest upon the character speaking.

No Scene Stealing.

Thus Henry Daniell, that splendid actor, has his particularly great scene when he articulates the poison that has entered his mind about his wife's infidelity. It is an extremely difficult scene for the actor playing it to carry conviction and not to seem ridiculous to a modern audience. But Mr. Daniell played it in the grand style with just the proper modulations in the modern manner of underplaying.

If Mr. Daniell were a ham of the old star-system, he could easily have ruined Jessie Royce Landis' greatness in the trial scene, where she must answer the false charge of adultery. But he stayed in his place, as did the judges and court attendants, giving full dramatic value to the despairing and infinitely pathetic plea of Miss Landis that her innocence is so obvious to everyone, except the king and his sycophants, that she demands a verdict from the Delphian oracle, not knowing herself how the oracle would be interpreted. This is a heart-breaking scene. I wept when Mr. Daniell pronounced the unusually clear oracle (proclaiming Miss Landis not guilty of the charges against her) to be false and ordered her to be put to death as a traitor and an adultress.

The Bard's Greatness.

Just when the emotional tension threatens to become too great, or when Florence Reed, as the Cassandra of the drama, threatens to disturb your dreams for nights with her forebodings and her frightful rightness, the old master playwright comes to bat and gives even Miss Reed a comic exit line, or introduces a comical rascal (Mr. Brent) or gives us an interlude of rustic abandon.

Proves Its Greatness.

In spite of 300 years of criticism that it is a minor tour-de-force which doesn't quite comes off, this Theater Guild production of "The Winter's Tale" shows me that it is one of the Bard's great theatrical masterpieces, poignant, lively, entertaining and beautiful.

If I had a cornucopia filled with the dandiest adjectives of praise, I would be strewing them around the doorsteps of everyone connected with this play; for they have all contributed much to my education as well as to my entertainment. But special honors must go to Ben Iden Payne and Romney Brent who staged the show, and to Stewart Chaney who designed the settings and the costumes, as well as to those mentioned above.

Oh, yes; some special posies must go to Geraldine Stroock, who makes a beautiful and enchanting Perdita. Others are deserving of mention, too. Their names may be found in the cast box. May the run be long and prosperous!

PM

JANUARY 16, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

When the Bard Went Bohemian

PM Reviews

In bringing *The Winter's Tale* to Broadway, the Theater Guild is giving a good many of us our first chance to see the play. It is a chance that, all in all, those interested in Shakespeare should not pass up. *The Winter's Tale* is not one of Shakespeake's most rewarding works, and the Guild has not given it an outstanding production. But the first half, at least, of the play has distinct theater virtues, while the second has its moments of lovely poetry; and the production, on the whole, is an effective enough one.

By the time Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale*, his intense vision of life, his profound concern with character, had either burned themselves out or been capriciously cast aside. It may be that he began this study of an insanely jealous man with the old impulse to search and probe, with the old tragic feeling for life. If so, the mood was not sustained. Some of the old power persists, and Leontes ravaged by jealousy remains an impressive pathological portrait. But the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale* have largely the appeal of old-fashioned high-slung melodrama; and after that, Shakespeare lost interest even in melodrama. He accordingly jumped over 16 years—and landed in fairyland. The rest of *The Winter's Tale* is pastoral and preposterous—shepherds and young lovers, rogues and clowns; bits of delightful poetry and whole chunks of dull prose. Through the whole play anachronisms run riot, Delphos is taken for an island and Bohemia provided with a sea-coast. The whole thing is just a tale, a winter's tale. But it is also, and this obviously is what most interested Shakespeare, a great exercise in versification.

• • •

At the Cort last night, the first three acts "played" pretty well. If this production has not the story drive that Margaret Webster gives to Shakespeare, it has at times a better sense of what is truly Shakespearean. As the jealous Leontes, Henry Daniell — perhaps from a desire not to over-act a violent role — was not a striking enough *performer*, but he read Shakespeare's verse with almost consistent distinction. That, with me, counted for a great deal. As his wronged queen, the serene and stately Hermione, Jessie Royce Landis was adequate enough. As the indignant and courageous Paulina, Florence Reed hissed her lines and flashed her eyes; she was, in fact, Florence Reed; but she was fun.

The last two acts could not, understandably enough, always save themselves from being a bore. Geraldine Stroock and Robert Duke made an agreeable enough Perdita and Florizel. But Autolycus, if by no means the worst of Shakespeare's comics, is a pretty tiring and (even with his part cut) loquacious one; and Clown, the bumpkin, is even worse. Nor was the hey-nonny-nonny of the pastoral scenes much of a success. As Autolycus, Romney Brent seemed to be having a very good time, but it was not very contagious.

Stewart Chaney has designed some nice enough sets, and the whole production strives to breathe life on a play that splits down the middle and is always a little in danger of falling apart. Like many of Shakespeare's works, *The Winter's Tale* is better read than seen. But I am glad I saw it.

—Louis Kronenberger

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 16, 1946

The Guild's Shakespeare Troupe Starts Off With 'Winter's Tale'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Theatre Guild has launched its Shakespearean company at the Cort Theatre with a pleasant production of "The Winter's Tale." The word pleasant seems an odd one, an unaccountably small one, to use on connection with any of Master William's plays—but it's the best I can think up right now.

The company is pleasing, although somewhat mixed in its individual styles; and the play is pleasing, albeit quite definitely mixed between rip-snorting tragedy and pastoral symphony. It's an odd piece of work upon a stage, is "The Winter's Tale"—which I suspect is the reason that last night's presentation was the first since 1910.

In the first period Shakespeare goes all out for grim affairs like a king's suspicion that his wife is an adulteress, the death of his son, the abandonment of his queen's new-born babe upon a foreign shore and the imprisonment of the queen herself.

In the second period the team changes goals and goes in for folk-dancing, pocket-picking, ballad-singing, love-making and as happy an ending as anything Hollywood e'er turned out. The play suffers from sciizophrenia and I think some of the actors do, too.

In the tragic first chukker only Florence Reed, as the queen's disloyal and doughty lady in waiting, seems to deliver her Shakespeare with the oomph one associates with the works of the bard. I believe Miss Reed would make a wonderful Hamlet—and do not think I am trying to be funny. More than one actress has played Hamlet, and the historians say they've done pretty well.

Every Inch an Actress.

Miss Reed just can't help being theatrical. With those eyes, that voice, that carriage and her deep experience, she is every inch an actress. A play-actress and a good one. Against her vividness some of the others seem pretty pallid. Henry Daniell, for instance, has an ideal Shakespearean face and build, but somehow I could raise little temperature over his woes and angers as the supicious king. I do like Jessie Royce Landis as the queen, for she is gentle and beautiful.

In the second, or pastoral, stanza, Romney Brent wanders in and out much as did Alfred Drake, the timeless minnesinger of the Theatre Guild's "Sing Out, Sweet Land." Mr. Brent filches purses, tells lies, explains things to the audience and is generally handy.

In this part, too, one views Whitford Kane as a shepherd who somehow got into Bohemia by way of Ulster; Kurt Richards as a loutish nitwit named—with admirable Shakespearean directness—Clown; James Starbuck as a dancing ram; Lili Mann as a dancing ewe, Robert Duke as an ardent young Prince Florizel and Geraldine Stroock as a pretty little foundling princess.

Shakespeare is Shakespeare, I guess, and I ought to keep my big mouth shut. But, pleasant as "The Winter's Tale" is, I'd just as soon see a revival of "Polonaise." I'd like to see Florence Reed in the Jan Kiepura part, too.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 16, 1946

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

Cold Night for the Bard

IN ITS latest offering at the Cort, the Theater Guild does not hide the fact that William Shakespeare is not at his best in "The Winter's Tale." Neither the poetry nor the construction of this play, about a king who ruins his life with mad jealously and then is saved by a series of lucky coincidences, is in the bard's best tradition. Its curious mixture of comedy and drama is often unbelievable, and it is certainly a difficult subject for revival. Though streamlined and pretentiously produced, it remains a generally uninspired evening in the theater.

In this version, organized into two acts in fifteen scenes, the two moods of the play are sharply separated. The first act plays out the tragedy with a combination of wild gestures and meek protestation, as King Leontes talks himself into a case of rabid but unfounded jealously against his wife and best friend, trying to kill his queen and his daughter and actually causing the death of his son. The second act becomes a comedy pastoral, as the daughter left in the wilderness to die is adopted by a shepherd, falls in love with another king's son and is finally reunited with her father. In "The Winter's Tale" Shakespeare's comedy has outlived his more serious mood; a good part of the latter half is light and amusing, whereas the ravings of Leontes in this version seem exaggerated and contrived, in both writing and acting.

* * *

The pastoral scenes are dressed up in bright yellow colors, with Romney Brent giving an engaging performance as Autolycus, the witty rogue who addles the pates of the silly shepherds and steals their gold while making them call him "good sir." Whitford Kane as an aged shepherd and Kurt Richards as his clownish son also help brighten this corner of the piece. In another vein there is Jessie Royce Landis giving an adequate reading of Hermione, the falsely accused queen, and Florence Reed, who is effectively poetic and bitter as the queen's chief defender. Henry Daniell, on the other hand, seems only weak and childishly wilful as the wrathful Leontes. Rendering able assistance among the supporting players are Colin Keith-Johnson as a faithful courtier; David Powell as the King of Bohemia, and Charles Francis as a graybeard attendant on Leontes.

* * *

The production by the Theater Guild is as elegant as one could wish; there are songs and dances in the musical comedy section of the play, colorful court and rustic costumes and settings by Stewart Chaney and a shaving of the running time to normal modern limits. Nevertheless, a good part of this presentation is very blunt drama indeed, and it is not much sharpened with the edge of Shakespearean poetry. The direction by B. Iden-Payne and Mr. Brent does not greatly help to mask the play's failings; it allows some nonsensical mouthings and attitudes to creep into the performances, and at one point it puts an actor on stage in a bearskin to chase another actor offstage and eat him —a device which serves very little comic or dramatic purpose. At best, the current production of "The Winter's Tale" is a little less than half satisfying for any but the most ardent students of the bard.

New York Post

JANUARY 16, 1946

Theatre Guild Revives 'The Winter's Tale' at Cort

By VERNON RICE

After viewing last night's initial performance of the Theatre Guild Shakespearean company's revival of the Bard's "The Winter's Tale," at the Cort, it is hard to imagine why this play has been on the shelf for some 35 years as far as Broadway is concerned. It has the works, so to speak.

Perhaps it is Shakespeare's own fault. He has written a drama that most in-the-know producers are prone to stay away from—one with two varying moods. The first part of the play is rather grim, filled with melodrama and all that goes with it, jealousy, suspicion, rage and misunderstanding.

Then comes the second part and the mood lifts and the play becomes a lark, a romp in the fields, an idealized study of young love.

The Guild and the production's directors, B. Iden Payne and Romney Brent, however, have bridged this difficulty with ease. Taking Shakespeare at his word that this is but a tale, they have staged the work as though they were book publishers bringing out a new edition of a fine old manuscript. Stewart Chaney's settings and costumes serve as sensitive and decorative illustrations. The actors play their roles as though they were story-book characters come to life to act in a costume charade.

All who had a hand in the production did not approach it with awe and knee-bending respect, but as sensible people with a solution to a difficult problem.

Blood Test Missing

It must be admitted that Shakespeare did not properly motivate his people in their actions. Leontes, for no apparent reason, just gets mad and accuses his wife, Hermione, of infidelity. That he casts away her child, after receiving everything but a blood test and a doctor's certificate declaring it his own, seems a little far fetched. Nor were his later sudden bursts of remorse and regret understandable.

Hermione, on the other hand, was oversimplified. She could be likened to one of our slick-paper magazine heroines who suffers and suffers and says not a word.

In the hands of Henry Daniell and Jessie-Royce Landis, however, these two characters seem almost real. Daniell ignores the chances to beat his chest and swagger and his Leontes becomes a human being.

Miss Landis' Hermione has dignity and quiet restraint and beauty as well.

When it comes to reading Shakespeare, though, or any other playwright, old or new, Florence Reed is the actress who can give lines brilliance and polished edges. As Paulina she is sheer delight.

And special plaudits should go to Whitford Kane, Romney Brent, David Powell, Kurt Richards, Philip Huston, Geraldine Strook and the rest of the large cast for contributing ably to this production that many times has charm and color, and at all times has interest.

The Guild definitely has not let the Bard down, and those who have to take their Shakespeare in easy doses should find this just their medicine.

"The Would-Be Gentleman"

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 10, 1946

A Would-Be Gent, Bobby Clark, Gives Moliere a Dandy Hotfoot

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Moliere was a comedian who wrote plays for himself and even stole from his own works. His patron was King Louis XIV of France. Bobby Clark is a comedian who has now written a play for himself, stolen mostly from Moliere. Mr. Clark's patron is King Michael the Todd, who had the grace last night to present Mr. Clark to the ladies and gentlemen of New York in "The Would-Be Gentleman."

The play, as it appears at the Booth Theatre, seems to be a new version of "Star and Garter," the novelty being that the cast now are wearing feathers as ornaments for their heads. It is a loud and rowdy burlesque, with one of the most amusing men in the world—Bobby Clark—leading the fun.

For more than a half of it Bobby keeps his wind and for more than half of it I shed tears of laughter. But, too soon, it became necessary to get a little plot into the thing, and the business of winding it up in time for people to go home induced a feeling of unrest.

There is plenty of Moliere in the comedy—but the new version nevertheless is all Clark. When Bobby is traversing the stage in his familiar rapid scuttle, or taking lessons in fencing, French philosophy in an effort to become a gentleman, everything is as good as it could possibly be. When Bobby is uttering his wolfish growl, or kicking his heels, or leering at the audience, happiness reigns.

Hilarious Routine.

When Moliere comes through, the result is less effective, for the work of this Seventeenth Century social satirist is not burlesque. It is civilized comedy; yet the company surrounding Mr. Clark bawl their lines rather than speak and act them, and remind me of Bobby's own great line about himself and the late Paul McCullough—"We may not sing good but we sing loud."

One of the most hilarious routines I ever saw is the business of educating Mr. Clark in fencing, dressing, musicianship and how to speak vowels. For a man of Bobby's age and weight it is a physical tour de force, and for a superb clown it is a high point of artistic achievement. His education in the didoes of a chamber orchestra, with an astonishing cellist named Fred Werner helping, left both him and me practically helpless. His bout with a bowl of soup while entertaining a marquise is the sort of thing which, had Chaplin done it in silent film days, highbrows would have written essays about.

Highbrows had better stay away from the Booth Theatre, though. Mr. Clark has taken many liberties with the original "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," including snitching lines from other Moliere comedies and tossing in a few of his own. The performance is not one of high style on the part of the rest of the company, and I think if it were it would be better.

The cast includes June Knight Edith King, Ann Thomas, Gene Barry and the dance team of Harrison and Fisher. The setting by Howard Bay is attractive, and Irene Sharaff has dressed the people amusingly or beautifully as occasion demands.

'THE WOULD-BE GENTLEMAN.'

Moliere's comedy, adapted by Bobby Clark; staged by John Kennedy; scenery is by Howard Bay; costumes by Irene Sharaff; presented by Michael Todd at the Booth Theater, Wednesday evening, January 9, 1946. The cast:

Music Master	Donald Burr
Dancing Master	Alec Fisher
Criquet	Fred Werner
Nicole	Ann Thomas
Marcel	Rand Elliot
Baptiste	Albert Henderson
Monsieur Jourdain	Bobby Clark
Madamoiselle Valere	Ruth Harrison
Singers	Constance Brigham, Mary Godwin and Lewis Pierce
Madame Jourdain	Edith King
Fencing Master	Earl MacVeigh
Philosopher	Frederic Persson
Count Dorante	Gene Barry
Lucille Jourdain	Eleanore Whitney
Covielle	Leonard Elliott
Cleonte	John Heath
Tailor	LaRoi Operti
Raymond	Lester Towne
Marquise Dorimene	June Knight

Synopsis—Act I—Drawing room in Monsieur Jourdain's House in Paris—circa 1670. Act II—Same as Act I. (Immediately following).

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 10, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'Would-Be Gentleman' Is All Bobby Clark

Bobby Clark, the irrepressible pantaloon who is perhaps the funniest of all low-burlesque comedians, at the Booth last night fulfilled (under the auspices of Michael Todd) a long-standing ambition—that of appearing in Moliere's farcical satire, "The Would-Be Gentleman."

Mr. Clark is such a favorite of mine that I wish this report could be less sour than, in the nature of things, it must be. I guess it is just that "The Would-Be Gentleman," first produced in 1671 with Moliere himself in the Jourdain role and, from all reports, a comedy long the favorite of the French, is not my dish as entertainment. I hasten to report that many in the audience differed with me last night and got quite a few laughs out of their systems.

Rowdy, Not Witty.

Of course, Mr. Clark is on stage most of the time and pretty much all over the place. He wears preposterous costumes, wigs, Chinese berets and hats with enough willow plumes to stuff a feather bed. He mugs it, talks to the audience in asides, buries his nose in his soup with pleasant noises, acts like a demented jumping jack and yells at the top of his voice.

Vulgarity is such a smug, snobbish, condescending word that I don't like to use it. The vulgar are the salt of the earth, and I flatter myself that I have tastes which in some things, are genuinely earthy, common and unpolished. But I must say that I found much in "The Would-Be Gentleman" which I thought was vulgar without being funny, mere rowdiness without being witty, tasteless and very juvenile. Some of its humor is so elementary as to be embarrassing.

There is one famous line from "The Would-Be Gentleman." That is when Mr. Jourdain learns, for the first time, that he has been speaking prose all his life without knowing it. Yet Mr. Clark muffed that witticism and made considerable more of the poorer lines which had bedroom connotations. He seemed to give of his very best only when he was whacked over the rear with a scimitar. There must have been a board in his pants, because you could have heard the whack in Times Square.

It is Mr. Clark's show, and his support could be improved in practically every instance. Ann Thomas gets prettier with the years and she shows that her rasping, nasal voice is a comic affectation and not natural to her. But she has very little to do. Nobody else has much to do, either, except Mr. Clark. They are all routine and rather listless, including the comic adagio dancers, Harrison and Fisher. Miss Fisher, with a daring lack of undergarments, provides the only sensual frisson of the evening; but she spoils it by the facial contortions with which she takes her bows.

Funniest Stunt.

The funniest thing in the show is a stunt by Fred Werner, cast as a cellist. There are five other musicians—Max Tartarsky, James Nassy, Eric Silberman, Gregory Benko and David Gindin—all playing, rather unhappily, the original Lully incidental music composed for the show. When Werner gets bored with the music (and with the show) he jumps up, twirls around twice in the air and lands with a resounding thump on his back. Mr. Clark tries the same stunt but gives it up as being too much for his years and his bones.

The story, as you may have heard, is about a rich bourgeois who wants to be a gentleman and to sport a mistress from the nobility. He doesn't achieve his aim, but he has a swell time throwing away his money. Howard Bay has designed an appropriately absurd set and Irene Sharaff has gone happily haywire in her designs of outlandish costumes. Mr. Todd says he has produced his play for Toots Shor, who seems to be a connoisseur of the arts with words of one syllable.

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The Sun

JANUARY 10, 1946

Bobby Clark Romps in His Moliere Comedy, but the Fun Is Not Sustained.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Bobby Clark, shorn of his bouncing cane and his acrobatic cigar, and minus his painted-on glasses, but still gleaming of eye and nimble of foot, returned to Broadway last night as the star and play-fixer of Moliere's "The Would-Be-Gentleman." Michael Todd makes the presentation at the Booth.

Clark is funny. He is frequently hilarious. He is all over the stage and seldom off of it. He does all of his old tricks and tries some new ones but "The Would-Be Gentleman" is never a play at all. It's a romp for its comedian—a knockabout travesty, a lark, a low-comedy burlesque, and that's unoubtedly what he had in mind when he set about devising the Moliere text to suit his particular needs.

It's a fact, however, that the fun in the Clark-Moliere collaboration is not sustained. There are too many lulls in the Booth's new farce. And in those rare moments when the show tries to go along without its star, it is lost completely.

You get an evening of Bobby Clark, all right. He speaks many of his lines far downstage, directly addressing the audience. He leers and grins and grimaces; he squeals and snorts and bellows. He prances and he capers. He kicks up his heels, does the Minuet, fondles a lace handkerchief, toys with a snuff box, adjusts his wig and takes a fencing lesson. He does everything except call out for Toots Shor by name. But the evening, as I've intimated, is sometimes a long one.

Bobby Clark's role in his adaptation of the seventeenth-century satire is that of the wealthy M. Jourdain, who seeks to make himself into a gentleman so as to acquire a mistress. He engages a music teacher, a dancing instructor, a fencing master, a philosopher and the finest of Parisian tailors, but it all comes to no avail because he loses the beautiful lady to the conniving Count Dorante. And his own daughter, by stratagem, gets the man of her choice. Gentleman or not, M. Jourdain is wearing an Oriental turban at the finish and is quite pleased with his lot.

Howard Bay's setting for the Louis XIV drawing room of the Jourdain home is something quite gorgeous, as are the costumes of Irene Sharaff. June Knight is vivacious and quite easy to look upon as the alluring Marquise Dorimene, desired by both Jourdain and the Count. LeRoi Operti contributes an engaging sketch as the tailor who brings along dazzling raiment. Frederic Persson is amusing as the philosopher and so is Earl MacVeigh as the fencing master. The capable Ann Thomas has little to do. Edith King is properly shrewish as the formidable Mme. Jourdain. John Kennedy had done the staging and Bobby Clark is probably an actor who would take direction if anybody could ever catch up with him.

"The Would-Be Gentleman," notwithstanding all that Clark has done to it and for it, is more horseplay than play. This version of modernized Moliere falls short as an evening's entertainment.

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Journal and American

JANUARY 10, 1946

Moliere 'Gentleman' Opens at the Booth

By ROBERT GARLAND

A real zesty bout, the bout last night in 45th st. Clark vs. Moliere, promoted by Mike Todd, the thespian promoter. Bobby in his contemporary corner, knocking himself out with effort. Jean-Baptiste in his classic corner, slugging posthumously for dear life.

And Toots Shor, for whom the battle of the Booth was scheduled, in his stageside seat, laughing his head off. Toots found it funnier than "Hamlet."

In an open-letter to Jean-Baptiste Moliere, author of "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," circa 1670, from Michael-Joseph Todd, producer of "The Would-Be Gentleman," 1946, the quick Mr. Todd is of the opinion that the dead M. Moliere composed his most celebrated comedy for the Toots Shors of his period.

And it was the Toddian hope that Mr. Shor would not rise from his seat and call, "Author! Author!"

Well, Toots did not rise from his seat and call for "Author! Author!" last night in 45th st. As a matter of reporting, nobody rose from anybody's seat and cried for anything. It is true that Bobby Clark took several bows, although he was too physically exhausted to talk about his setto with the Frenchman.

But it had been frenetic fun while it had lasted, and it had lasted longer than it should have.

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Poor Rich Man

If you promise not to repeat it in the presence of my betters, I will herewith confess that I always have found "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" pretty heavy going. Man and boy, soldier and civilian, critic and cash customer, I have heard it in several languages and seen it in even more localities. Always has it been a bore. Not as big a bore as the same playwright's "Le Malade Imaginaire," maybe.

But a bore, just the same. And now, hoked-up with backgrounds by Howard Bay, costumes by Irene Sharaff, direction by John Kennedy and hairdos by Charles of the Ritz, it continues to leave me where it found me.

Even the super-hoking-up of Bobby Clark, one of America's finer funny men, does little or nothing to brighten the corner of Broadway where, in Toots Shor's honor, it happens to be on view.

As conceived by M. Moliere and re-conceived by Mr. Clark, the spoken biography of the tragically ambitious Seventeenth Century Parisian is no laughing matter. Surrounded by music masters, dancing masters and fencing masters; jealous women, grasping women and wicked women; crafty men, crooked men and male musicians, the unheroic hero of "The Would-Be Gentleman" is a phoney only a Frenchman could find laughable.

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Cheers for Clark

In the zesty bout between the American player and the French playwright staged last night at the Booth, it was the admirable antics of Bobby Clark that instigated almost constant laughter in the familiar middle-aged 45th st. auditorium. Toots Shor, and I, and you, were having a low old time over Mr. Clark, the clown, not M. Moliere, the dramatist. Mr. Clark could have done as well with the dictionary.

This is not Bobby's first onstage bout with the minor imported classics of the theatre. The cast of Congreve's "Love For Love" has been bettered by his presence, as has the cast of Sheridan's "The Rivals." Now, it is difficult to imagine how the cast of Moliere's "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" could limp along without him. Or even the cast of his own raffish rearrangement. His is the life of the Parisian's party.

June Knight, having begun the Beguine at the Imperial, is finishing the Marquise at the Booth. Ruth Harrison and Alex Fisher remain their diverting dancing selves.

As Covielle, Leonard Elliott is a drama-critic gone right. Fred Werner comes engagingly from the big tops to impersonate Criquet . . . Having gotten this "Would-Be Gentleman" off Toots Shor's calendar, Mike Todd and Bobby Clark can turn to less esoteric slapstick.

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The New York Times

JANUARY 10, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Bobby Clark is a great man, and when justice triumphs he will be elected one of the seven wonders of the world, no doubt displacing Niagara Falls. With his grin, twinkling eye and gurgle that comes from somewhere below his shoes, he has for years beaten polite society back to the side of the old runways of burlesque. Usually he can do no wrong, nor often is he wronged. Last evening at the Booth, however, there seemed to be an enemy in the house, the actor-playwright named Moliere, in whose "The Would-Be Gentleman" Bobby appeared. This morning's dregs are bitter. Seventeenth-century satire, even freely edited, is not the dish for Bobby Clark, and Michael Todd's most recent dip into the classics does not make for a full evening's happiness in the theatre.

* * *

It is just a case of play and player being some light-years apart. The actor has said that he collaborated with Moliere on the new reading, putting some lines from the formal writer's other plays into "The Would-Be Gentleman" but keeping the story more or less intact. Bobby is best when he can come on the stage like a burst of lightning, dash around and throw everything into confusion and then retire while ahead. In the classics, however, they prefer their actors to be on hand most of the time, and there are a good many occasions in the current evening when the hero must improvise a bit too strenuously.

"The Would-Be Gentleman" was a satire about the ignoramus who wanted to be in the mode. As editor, Bobby quickly has dropped this to straight farce. There are no characters and no cohesion. At the Booth the tale has become simply a series of vaudeville incidents —M. Jourdain at fencing. M. Jourdain with his tailor—and while some of them are very funny because of M. Jourdain, they vary as sketches. It is a little like a revue without music, but a revue with only one actor. There is no denying that at the banquet table Bobby is as funny as he ever has been, but there are not enough banquets and they are not on a consistently amusing level.

* * *

The rest of the cast need do little save stand around and watch Bobby perform, and when that master is off catching his breath, the rest of the cast gives the impression of just standing. M. Jourdain so out-Hamlets Hamlet that the whole thing comes to a dead halt when he is away. June Knight, as the Marquise whom Jourdain hopes to seduce; Eleanor Whitney, his daughter, and Ann Thomas, the maid, range up the line from pretty, but they have nothing to do. Edith King is Jourdain's brow-beating wife, Leonard Elliott and John Heath are a nobleman and valet, Donald Burr is the music master. The team of Harrison and Fisher does a dance caricature which becomes as broad as the play, and Irene Sharaff's costumes are in the same mood.

Now that he has paid his decent respects to the classics, Bobby should go back to destroying bigger and noisier stages. He has handled Moliere so that it all is neither a fanciful "Would-Be Gentleman" nor always one-hundred-per-cent Bobby Clark.

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 10, 1946

By HOWARD BARNES

The Professional Mr. Clark

A GREAT clown has been meddling with a classic and has come forth with a wonderfully funny show. Bobby Clark, in his prankish adaptation of Moliere's "The Would-Be Gentleman," adds immeasurable gayety to the theatrical season. He has been afforded a smart and colorful production of his stunt by Michael Todd. The fact remains that the new offering at the Booth Theater is an individual and ingenious inspiration. When the roguish star is off stage his mere absence causes the nonsensical doings to lag. Fortunately, he is around almost all the time, making one marvel, in one of his own lines, "how low thoughts can soar so high."

* * *

For the comedian has taken the skeleton of a highly conventional seventeenth-century French comedy and given it brilliant burlesque animation. The social satire is as sound as it ever was in the original "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme." The characterizations are genuinely biting as well as amusing. And the incidental furbelows which endeared Moliere to a fancy set of foolish people in a Paris of some three centuries ago are hilarious. "The Would-Be Gentleman" is generally in the key of theatrical rough-house, but it has so many laughs that they are scattered around as prodigally as Monsieur Jourdain tosses supposed gold pieces across the stage of the Booth.

Obviously Clark has taken over the central character of the farce lock stock and barrel. It is no idiotic parvenu whom you will find on Forty-fifth Street. Even in the scenes which hew close to the original dramatic pattern, as Monsieur Jourdain takes music, dancing and fencing lessons and summons a philosopher to aid him in an amorous conquest, it is difficult to believe that he is much of a boob. As a matter of fact, one is likely to look for those grease-paint spectacles and the elusive cigar which have been the particular trademark of the actor. He needs no particular props. A court costume, a sword or a crazy Turkish costume serve him amply in "The Would-Be Gentleman."

* * *

The great tour-de-force of the work, though, is the fact that the comedian knows his Moliere, no matter how freely he has adapted his lines. The running patter of gags which accompanies the action may offend the pedants. They are certain to have plain, ordinary spectators rocking in their seats for weeks to come. Low comedy becomes high comedy at the Booth, no matter what the source material may be. There are several clever assistants of the star, notably June Knight as a marquise with whom the would-be gentleman wishes a "rendez-vous," Leonard Elliott and the dance satirists, Ruth Harrison and Alex Fisher. Their best efforts fall very flat when Clark starts cavorting. The costumes by Irene Sharaff are in a properly burlesque mood, and John Kennedy's staging is almost as brisk as the wacky proceedings demanded. For fun go to "The World-Be Gentleman."

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New York Post

JANUARY 10, 1946

'The Would-Be Gentleman' Opens At the Booth With Bobby Clark

By VERNON RICE

Scholars may squirm, purists may shudder and sourpusses may smirk at the riot that went on for a play at the Booth last night when Michael Todd brought in Bobby Clark's version of the Moliere comedy, "The Would-Be Gentleman."

Frankly, it isn't French; it isn't 17th century; it isn't even Moliere, but it is pure Bobby Clark, and when viewed as such it is pretty wonderful.

What if Moliere, this time, served as a mere scenario writer; what if stylized charades were turned into high moments of low comedy; what if Bobby Clark provided himself with the fattest, the best, the funniest part he has had in years? Who is going to care? Certainly not those who love Bobby, and it is hard, at the moment, to imagine anyone who doesn't.

Sacrifices Were Made

In reducing this satire of manners to a Broadway brawl, however, sacrifices were made. The supporting characters became mere stooges and the few odd moments became tiresome when Bobby abandoned center stage for the wings.

Then, too, the satire on bourgeoisie with social ambitions somehow got lost in the struggle of a funny little man trying to have a rendevous, and all that it implies, with a beautiful, desirable young woman.

And while we are in a fault-finding mood it might as well be admitted that in telescoping the play to two acts the second act doesn't come off as well as the first; that the costumes of Irene Sharaff, with the exception of those designed for Clark, and the one set of Howard Bay, were disappointments in their lack of humor and sparkle; that the direction of John Kennedy was uneven, and that Harrison and Fisher performed one of the most unfortunate, unfunny, satiric dance routines ever witnessed.

Fortunately, though, everything was secondary to Bobby Clark, and there were times when it almost seemed as though all his years in the theatre had been spent as preparation for his own interpretation of Monsieur Jourdain, the eager-beaver for culture. Funny is not the word for Bobby in this role. He is a riot, a scream and a howl.

The rest of the cast, as has been said before, were merely players. June Knight had little chance to be anything but beautiful as the sought-after Marquise Dorimene; Edith King, as Madame Jourdain, was called upon to do very little but feed lines to Bobby, and Ann Thomas, Eleanore Whitney, Gene Barry, Leonard Elliott, John Heath and the others put in their appearances pleasantly.

Regardless, it looks as though Mike Todd has another hit on his hands.

PM EXCLUSIVE

JANUARY 10, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Bobby Clark Tries a Classic

PM Reviews

Moliere is one of the great comedy writers of all time, and Bobby Clark can be one of the funniest fellows alive. Put that way, it would seem that a combination of the two would be terrific. But *The Would-Be Gentleman*, as presented at the Booth last night, is a good deal less than that. It yields some wonderfully funny moments of Clarkish cutting up, and scenes, here and there, that manage to be entertaining; but the evening proves a very long one, and great chunks of it simply fall flat.

The fault is mostly Moliere's—even after remarking that Master Clark has been a little free with the Frenchman's script and even freer with his spirit. The fault is mostly Moliere's because *The Would-Be Gentleman* is no longer a play with much juice in it. The would-be gentleman himself, the famous M. Jourdain, is doubtless an immortal figure. The nobility-chasing cit who is charmed to learn that he has been talking prose all his life and who, in his efforts to be a gentleman, manages to be everybody's dupe, remains a classic butt of satire. But the doltish climber who inhabits so many French and English plays of the 17th century has ceased to be, on the old broad lines, the fresh figure of fun that he was when the bourgeoisie first asserted itself. And in the particular case of *The Would-Be Gentleman*, Moliere offered nothing very inspired in the way of a play. He was content to satirize M. Jourdain by placing him in a series of small situations—with dancing masters and fencing masters, with a count who fleeced him and a marquise who eyed him as a circus creature. These small situations have, at most, a kind of vaudeville value; and most of it is no longer very lively vaudeville.

Bobby Clark has pitched on M. Jourdain as much less a creature of satire than a pure figure of fun. He plays Jourdain for low comedy, and *The Would-Be Gentleman* for extravaganza. He does not create a character, he provides a clown. He is, in fact, Bobby Clark in outlandish period clothes instead of burnt-cork spectacles. A fencing lesson or a dancing lesson or a dinner with a marquise is merely the signal for unrationed antics, for any gag or piece of business or bit of himself that comes to mind. Only a purist would object to all this; only a purist too wrapped up in Moliere ever to have heard of Bobby Clark would be surprised. And all the fun that this *Would-Be Gentleman* contains is owing to its star. Sometimes it is wonderful fun. But not often enough. Bobby, to be frank, strains and forces and over-reaches himself. He does some of the same things too often. He has, more than ever, a dismaying habit of talking straight at the audience. Bobby being himself as Bob Acres in *The Rivals* was a delight, because we had just enough of him. Here, I'm afraid, we have a little too much—at least in the sense that the role won't support that much.

On the other hand, when Bobby's not around, there is just no play at all. The rest of the cast struggle with their lines, but they are merely lines to struggle with. Scenically, *The Would-Be Gentleman* has it points: Howard Bay has created a nice set, and Irene Sharaff has achieved some inspired atrocities of costuming.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"A Joy Forever"

Journal and American

JANUARY 8, 1946

'Joy Forever' Opens At Biltmore Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

First-nighters were whistling "It Might as Well Be Spring" last night in W. 47th st., hard by Eighth ave. The Dommaei Restaurant ran out of spumoni. The Edison Drug Store displayed rhubarb-and-soda. Tony Mazzaria closed his shoeshine stand and took Maria and the kids to Coney. The Automat sold practically no hot chocolate. The Second-Hand Gardenia Girl cast her blossoms in the gutter.

And a spring-fever of a play found its way into the Biltmore. It was "A Joy Forever" (unquote) which, according to the programs, is "a new comedy" by Vincent McConnor, presented by Blevins Davis and Archie Thomson, with staging by Reginald Denham, setting by Stewart Chaney, starring by Guy Kibbee and featured-playing by Dorothy Sands, Nicholas Joy, Natalie Schafer, Loring Smith and Seth Arnold.

Everybody connected with "A Joy Forever" should know better. Even the amateurs who wrote and produced it. But especially the actors who, keeping their faces straight and their chins up, made-believe therein. Mr. Kibbee, who now calls Hollywood his home, may have forgotten, but Miss Sands, Mr. Joy, Miss Schafer, Mr. Smith and Mr. Arnold must surely be aware that a one-set play isn't necessarily a good one.

Not even if that set's by Stewart Chaney.

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Not Much Ado—

If "A Joy Forever" is about anything, which it really isn't, it's about a tiresome old painter called, for purposes of protection, Benjamin Vinnicum. He belongs to the Hudson River School of canvas-sollers in its most Fort Tryon Park-like aspect. When the curtain rises on his Stewart Chaney studio, he's playing hide-and-seek beneath a beautiful old bedspread supplied by Daziens.

After awhile he bestirs himself and performs fleetingly upon an accordion supplied by Fortana. It's then the faint unfolding of the plot begins. Benjamin Vinnicum is a long-lost artist. Benjamin Vinnicum has put down his brush and taken up his bottle. But Benjamin Vinnicum is just about to be rediscovered. With piles of paintings stacked up in his studio, the old boy is on the verge of money.

Like the distraught dustman in Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion," Benjamin Vinnicum has no yen for riches. All he craves is Tina, his mistress; Old Dan and Young Dan, his boy-friends; Constance Sherman, his girl-friend, and the bottles of gin, rum and brandy, kummel, rye and vodka, he has hidden on-stage, off-stage and in his lady's chamber. These authentic-looking flagons, supplied by—

Anyway, they make an honest woman out of Tina.

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About Nothing

That's all there is. There isn't any more, not even in the East Coast hands of Dorothy Sands, who plays Tina as if she wanted to take stock in so incredible a character; Nicholas Joy, who pretends to be an Art Critic who knows a Vinnicum from a Vedder; Natalie Schafer, who projects the Rich Man's Darling as if she enjoyed it, and Loring Smith, who projects the Darling's Rich Man as if he didn't.

That Guy Kibbee, who, to borrow from "Who's Who" in the playbills, never takes the time to see his own motion pictures, will surely pardon me when I say that I have never taken the time to see his motion pictures either. He has made more than a hundred of them and I'll not be surprised if he soon finds the time to return to the West Coast along with Spencer Tracy and make some more of them. Here, he's wasted!

Judged by the high-class, the elegant, the refined art-talk in this, his maiden attempt at playmaking, Vincent McConnor knows more about the craft of the studio than he knows about the craft of the theatre. And a great deal more about painting than his Benjamin Vinnicum, if the Benjamin Vinnicum masterpieces displayed, prestidigitator-like, up on the Biltmore's stage are criteria—or should it be "criterions?"

Anyway, "A Joy Forever" is no thing of beauty.

'A JOY FOREVER.'

Comedy by Vincent McConnor; staged by Reginald Denham; production designed by Stewart Chaney; presented by Blevins Davis and Archie Thomson at the Biltmore Theater Monday evening, January 7, 1946. The cast:

Tina	Dorothy Sands
Frith	Charles Laffin
Benjamin Vinnicum	Guy Kibbee
Young Dan	William Nunn
Old Dan	Seth Arnold
Constance Sherman	Ottilie Kruger
Harrison Eames	Loring Smith
Archer Barrington	Nicholas Joy
Wallace	Joe Johnson
Mrs. Tillery	Frieda Altman
Guard	Rollin Bauer
Allora Eames	Natalie Schafer
Model	Charlen Ross Jr.
Delivery Man	Fred Knight
Assistant Delivery Man	Lucian Self
Mrs. Danforth	Lois Bolton

SYNOPSIS—The studio of Benjamin Vinnicum, overlooking Fort Tryon Park, in New York City. Act I. Scene 1. A morning in March. Scene 2. Several hours later. Act II. Scene 1. One week later. Scene 2. Several hours later. Act III. The following morning.

The New York Times

JANUARY 8, 1946

Art Is Long

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"A Joy Forever" may be added to the calendar on trivia, although let there be no viciousness about it this morning. Vincent McConnor's comedy about a rediscovered artist simply is not a good play, and there the matter may rest. Ushered to the Biltmore last night by the firm of Blevins Davis and Archie Thomson, it tries to ally itself with the school of "The Man Who Came to Dinner," etc., and it fails rather badly. There are a few cheerful lines and an amiable performance by Guy Kibbee, but that is all and it is not enough.

Mr. McConnor is telling of an elderly artist who quit painting some thirty years before and is living irascibly with an elderly housekeeper in a remodeled barn uptown. Word gets out that he had not died, as thought, and presently his spare room of paintings are valued at $1,000,000. A store owner wants to buy them, various people claim some of them; the artist solves everything by simply giving them away on the principle of first come, first served. He continues living in the remodeled barn, following the theory of happiness as a virtue over money.

If he had the right script, Mr. Kibbee obviously could be a matinee idol. He goes through "A Joy Forever" gruffly, cheerfully, and as though he, at least, liked the elderly artist. Dorothy Sands is gentle as the housekeeper, Nicholas Joy is an art critic, Loring Smith is the department-store owner. Some of the roles are so badly written that their Equity counterparts cannot help but look occasionally foolish, and a good many incidents of the play are something less than unique and novel. Stewart Chaney has designed a barn which any artist would be proud to call home.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

The Sun

JANUARY 8, 1946

'A Joy Forever' Brings Back Guy Kibbee, but It's Rambling and Tiresome.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The theater suffered a relapse last night with the presentation of "A Joy Forever," comedy by Vincent McConnor, which brought Guy Kibbee back to Broadway after many years in Hollywood. He is a fine character comedian. He deserves something far better than the new play at the Biltmore.

This rambling and tiresome little piece is all about an eccentric artist who withdrew from life when one of his paintings was criticized and has lived for thirty years in penniless obscurity in an old warehouse near the Hudson and Fort Tryon Park. There, with his 326 paintings and his housekeeper-companion, he is rediscovered—and his peace is ended. All sorts of characters, including an art critic and a high-powered business man seeking to purchase the collection for $1,000,000, intrude upon old Benjamin Vinnicum. He finally gives all his paintings away and decides to take the housekeeper as his bride.

"A Joy Forever" is actually nothing more than an expanded sketch. There is a situation and there is material for one act, but not for three. And some good actors are wasted.

The deft and knowing Guy Kibbee, who has a fine sense of timing, actually makes a person out of the crusty, testy, explosive Benjamin Vinnicum. The suave and theater-wise Nicholas Joy is believable enough as the art critic but he, too, is in need of a play. Dorothy Sands gets something of a characterization into the role of the faithful Tina. Seth Arnold is amusing in a minor part. Loring Smith storms about as the art-conscious head of a department store. Natalie Schafer brings some life to a role that is utterly foolish. Ottilie Kruger, daughter of Otto Kruger, appears as an art student who inspires Vinnicum to take to his canvas again after a lapse of thirty years.

Reginald Denham has directed. Blevins Davis and Archie Thompson are the producers. Stewart Chaney designed the crumbling old warehouse. They all tried. But "A Joy Forever" is just too flimsy to have been produced at all.

New York Post

JANUARY 8, 1946

Art Spelled With a Capital 'A' Overworked in 'A Joy Forever'

By VERNON RICE

Somewhere along the play-writing road Vincent McConnor, author of last night's "A Joy Forever," which opened at the Biltmore and unhappily brought back Guy Kibbee to Broadway after a 16 years' absence, must have stopped off for a rest at an art bull session held in Greenwich Village one night during that nearly forgotten period when the Village WAS the Village.

And Mr. McConnor must have heard a lot of fine talk, which, apparently, impressed him no end, and inspiration caused him to write a first play that would include every known cliche, every known phrase ever uttered by artists who talk more than they paint.

It was the playwright's unwise decision to put these unweighty utterances into the mouth of one of these lovable but repugnant old men, and Mr. Kibbee was forced to spend most of the evening roaming around the stage mouthing such gems as, "One thing missing in life's painting is life itself," and "To live one must die many times. I've been dead 30 years. Today I came alive."

Mr. Kibbee, remember, wasn't playing an unbalanced youth of 16. Several times the play's dialogue assured us that the character was 70 years old.

Love Finds a Way

If old Benjamin Vinnicum, the role played by Kibbee, was occupied by thoughts of painting, his mind also was pretty busy on thoughts of love. Thirty years before the comedy's beginning he had painted a canvas that became famous as "The Hudson River Nude." Shocking must have been the word for it, for it caused so much talk that Vinnicum decided to take his paintings, all 326 of them, and the model, who posed for the work, and retire from the world in an old, abandoned warehouse. Love blossomed midst the shattered roof and the broken windows and the bats, and though the old codger did a lot of ranting in his beard and fidgeting in his untidy clothes, he really was pretty happy, except when he said, "Buss me, my Queen," he expected his loved one to buss him. And she did. The two of them grew mellow and sweet as they held hands and bussed.

This idyllic existence could not go on forever, of course. The two lovers' happy hideout was finally discovered by an art critic, a young feminine art student, an old model and some people who want to buy his fabulous collection for much less than its million dollars' worth. But after three acts and a good deal of tiresome talk, Old Vinnicum decided to give the pictures away, enabling the people who received the paintings to sell them, thereby spreading a goodly amount of happiness and cheer.

As the curtain falls, Vinnicum returns to his painting, abandoned during those thirty years, and to his bussing, which had been going on throughout the play.

Good people like Kibbee, Dorothy Sands, who plays the devoted model; Nicholas Joy, Natalie Schafer and Loring Smith labor seriously and valiantly to bring life to the play. If they failed, it wasn't their fault. Blevins Davis and Archie Thomson, the producers, had the good sense to hire Stewart Chaney to design the comedy's one set for their initial attempt in the straight play field, for it had all the life and color and art that all the people talked about all evening.

The total result, however, of "A Joy Forever" was not what the quotation from which the title was taken indicates it might be. Come again, Mr. Kibbee. Next time in a play more worthy of your time and talents.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

PM EXCLUSIVE

JANUARY 8, 1946

—Kronenberger—

Guy Kibbee Toils in Vain

PM Reviews

It was very wise of *A Joy Forever* to lure Guy Kibbee back to Broadway in its leading role. Mr. Kibbee does all that can be done with the part. But it was not so wise of Mr. Kibbee to come back to Broadway in *A Joy Forever. A Joy Forever,* unfortunately, is nothing in the way of a play.

Mr. McConnor has written about a great forgotten painter who is rediscovered in old age. Benjamin Vinnicum is a salty old codger who gave up painting when one of his nudes involved the girl who posed for it in a scandal. For he happened to love the girl; and after the 30 years they have spent in retirement he still loves the old lady she has become. Then, one day, a reporter ferrets out his story, and at once the world beats a path to his door.

• • •

What follows is a pretty desperate—and languid—mixture of comedy, farce, sentiment and preaching about Art. Mr. McConnor has no plot, only a situation; and his way with a situation is to push all kinds of visitors across Vinnicum's doorstep, from sexy society dames introduced for laughs to crass millionaire art collectors introduced for lambastings. With all these people taking turns at bat, and none of them proving interesting, *A Joy Forever* dribbles along through three listless acts. Only Vinnicum himself, thanks largely to Mr. Kibbee, has any life to him. Mr. Kibbee makes a good stage figure of him—a gruff, lusty, proudly protesting figure who speaks up for the independence and anti-materialism of the artist. But Mr. Kibbee performs in a vacuum. Mr. McConnor, far from writing anything that resembles a play, has never quite decided what kind of play he wants to write. And he has little feel for comedy or knack for dialogue.

Mr. Denham's direction is rather broad, and the supporting cast rather uneven.

—Louis Kronenberger

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 8, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

"Pass Into Nothingness"

THERE are reliable players involved in Vincent McConnor's pastiche about pictorial art at the Biltmore. For all their efforts, "A Joy Forever" is no joy whatsoever. Guy Kibbee swings staunchly through the proceedings, pretending to be a neglected genius. Dorothy Sands, Nichols Joy and the others in the company attack their roles inquisitively and with definie bewilderment. It is no wonder that they are bewildered. While the author employs a celebrated line from a romantic poet for the title of his nonsense, a reviewer may be excused for paraphrasing the end of the lyrical phrase by contending that this production will certainly pass into nothingness.

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Keats would certainly do several flip-flops in his grave if he saw the latest of the Broadway openings. McConnor has picked a familiar theme for his tiny variations. He has supposed that a brilliant artist immured himself for thirty years in a barn overlooking Fort Tryon Park because he painted a model in the nude, onl yto be jerked out of oblivion when a reporter stumbled into his workshop. He has taken the opportunity to write a lot of high-sounding esthetic speeches inspired by the title. He has introduced some vaguely symbolic scenes about money lenders and true artists. He has quite failed to write a reasonable or entertaining play.

• • •

Kibbee, as the Van Gogh of his day, is very smart in playing the part for laughs. His boisterous impersonation of Vinnicum is frequeently amusing. It is just too bad when he has to elaborate, in McConnor's faltering phrases, on "A thing of beauty is a joy forever; its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness." In the same way Miss Sands, who is a character actress of great skill, is virtually stopped in her tracks in having to portray the beloved model of the painter who unwittingly causes him to give up his flaming talent. Joy plays an art critic with burlesque accents but a minimum of conviction and Miss Shafer has considerable trouble in conjuring up laughter even when she wanders around in silk pajamas with a sable throw over her shoulders.

• • •

"A Joy Forever" is the sort of improvised comedy that makes a play for minor characterizations, in tacit admission that there is nothing of consequence in the theme. Seth Arnold and William Nunn do rathes well with a couple of these bits. Incidentally, Reginald Denham has staged the work as though he knew no better than the author what it added up to and Stewart Chaney has designed an adequate setting for inadequate dramatic activity.

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 8, 1946

'A Joy Forever' Quite Likely Will Pass Into Nothingness, Mr. Keats

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Vincent McConnor, a new playwright, and Guy Kibbee, an old actor, got together at the Biltmore Theatre last night for the vernissage of a comedy called "A Joy Forever." Mr. Kibbee won, and when an actor wins over a playwright there isn't any play and the thing closes and the actor is soon back in Hollywood considering another screen role.

Mr. McConnor's comedy is about a whiskered coot who has a barnful of paintings in Ft. Tryon Park, N. Y. The coot hasn't painted anything for 30 years, but he makes enough to support his mistress—a prim little thing who used to be his model—by working as a sandwich man for $2 a day.

The painter and his lady are quite happy until the painter is discovered. A department store magnate wants to buy his 300-odd canvases for a half-million dollars, later raises the bid to a million. Art critics, guards from a nearby old folks' home, lecherous wives, former models gone plump and suburban, students of yoga and even telephones invade the old coot's once-peaceful barn, and the painter isn't happy until he has given away all 300-odd of his masterpieces and started to work again.

Miss Sands a Help.

I suppose Mr. McConnor's art-world lingo is okay. It sounded convincing to me, although personally I didn't give a damn. And Mr. McConnor's humor—his way of pointing up a funny line—is quite intelligent. But his sense of story and his feeling for farce-comedy pace are not enough to make the grade.

The actors are pleasant. Mr. Kibbee, whose show it is, acts the painter the way Cyril Maude played "Grumpy" when I was a tot, and it is pleasant to see him in the flesh once again. Dorothy Sands, as his ever-loving ex-model, gives a sweet little wistful performance, and the company includes Nicholas Joy, Natalie Schafer, Loring Smith and Ottilie Kruger—the last-named the fledgling daughter of Otto Kruger of Hollywood.

The studio setting by Stewart Chaney is, perhaps, more genuinely funny than the play. When I got tired of listening to the actors last night I'd look around Mr. Chaney's set some more and have a pretty good time.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 8, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

Kibbee's 'Joy Forever' Won't Run That Long

I regret to say that the starring vehicle, "A Joy Forever," which brought Guy Kibbee back to Broadway at the Biltmore last night, is not, precisely, a gold-embossed Pumpkin Coach. It has all the sad appurtenances of a Black Maria.

The program notes say that "Mr. Kibbee has made over a hundred pictures, a good many of which he has never taken the time to see."

That's a cruel blow to a lot of us Kibbee fans. We thought he was in every second-run feature we had seen in the past 30 years. And we always thought he was pretty good. If Mr. Kibbee doesn't like himself in the pictures, he should get a load of himself in "A Joy Forever."

In "A Joy Forever," Mr. Kibbee is a retired painter, who is astounded that any one should offer him $10 for a canvas. How he has lived for years in the swell studio Stewart Chaney designed for him is not made clear. But, it seems, art critics have decided that Mr. Kibbee's stuff is worth a million dollars.

Everyone, including ancient females who posed for Mr. Kibbee when they were young and plastic, and millionaire art collectors, scramble for the old boy's paintings. . . . But he fools them all, in the end he gives all his painting away to penniless persons who appreciate them. . . . Isn't he a rip?

Natalie Shafer is very pretty and so is Ottilie Kruger, but why is Miss Kruger supposed to be in the show at all? She is cast as a young art student who idolizes Guy Kibbee. She is kept painting a Tarzan (beautiful muscles and 7 feet tall) without our ever seeing what she has done. One never knows what the author has done either—except to torture the customers.

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"Show Boat"

New York Post

JANUARY 7, 1946.

Opulent New 'Show Boat' Opens at the Ziegfeld

By Wilella Waldorf

Oscar Hammerstein 2d prefers that his new production of "Show Boat" which arrived at the Ziegfeld Theatre last Saturday be known, not as a revival in the usual sense of the term, but as a "1946 approach to a musical show of 1927." He adds in a program note that he and the late Jerome Kern have kept the libretto and score substantially as they were originally written, eliminating only one scene and three minor musical numbers, and adding a new Kern song entitled "Nobody Else But Me."

With one or two very minor exceptions, however, the cast is entirely changed. The Urban sets have been replaced by more modern style backgrounds designed by Howard Bay and there is a "don't spare the cash" atmosphere about the whole venture that would have impressed Ziegfeld himself in his palmiest days. The new "Show Boat" is a tremendously elaborate, colorful, densely populated affair.

Nothing is easier, of course, than harking back to the original performance of a popular hit of nearly twenty years ago, with a tear in the eye and a sob in the throat, and pronouncing the new version a disappointment. This we have no intention of doing, partly because the new "Show Boat" can be recommended in many respects on its own, and partly because we were never among those starry-eyed theatregoers of the twenties who insisted that the old "Show Boat" was the greatest musical show of this century and the last.

Those Kern Songs

"Show Boat" has always seemed to us a decorative, somewhat overdone extravaganza, distinguished by a really superior Jerome Kern score. The story which Mr. Hammerstein dug out of Edna Ferber's novel had the virtue of being somewhat less hackneyed twenty years ago than it is now, and so had the music, but even back in 1927 we found some of the goings-on at the Ziegfeld rather on the ponderous side, a bit over-sentimental and even rather foolish at times in their down-to-the-depths, up-to-the-heights leaping from success to failure, failure to success, etc., with the old folks done up in the end in a bevy of white wigs that might have been borrowed from one of the French courts.

It was evident last Saturday night that the audience that came to see and hear this new "Show Boat" came chiefly to hear it, for every time a familiar tune was sung, the enthusiasts promptly drowned out several bars of it with wildly appreciative applause. Eager as they were to listen to the dear old numbers again, the Ziegfeld's first-nighters were even more eager to indicate to those round about that they recognized each hit as it came along.

Although we have just registered a vow not to make invidious comparisons with 1927, there is hardly any doubt that the present cast is weak on principals. The difficulty seems to be that most of them are not downright bad, merely routine. Perhaps, Mr. Hammerstein would reply, this is a difference between 1927 and 1946—we haven't the talent now we had then. At least, if we have, he hasn't been able to find it.

Nice as the music is, we find in our program only two of the famous Kern songs marked with a note indicating that they were sung with some approach to the proper style, "Bill," sung by Carol Bruce, and "Ol' Man River," rendered by Kenneth Spencer. The rest were up and down, some very down indeed.

"Show Boat" has always been noted more for sentiment than humor and Ralph Dumke's Cap'n Andy is very 1946 musical comedy indeed, meaning that it is not very funny. There is, however, some spirited dancing notably by the Negro artiste Pearl Primus and her troupe.

SHOW BOAT, a revival of the Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein 2d musical based on Edna Ferber's novel. Staged by Hassard Short; dances by Helen Tamiris; scenery by Howard Bay; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; book directed by Mr. Hammerstein, sponsored by the late Mr. Kern and Mr. Hammerstein. At the Ziegfeld Theatre.

Windy	Scott Moore
Steve	Robert Allen
Pete	Seldon Bennett
Queenie	Helen Dowdy
Parthy Ann Hawks	Ethel Owen
Captain Andy	Ralph Dumke
Ellie	Colette Lyons
Frank	Buddy Rhan
Rubber Face	Francis Mahoney
Julie	Carol Bruce
Gaylord Ravenal	Charles Fredericks
Vallon	Ralph Chambers
Magnolia	Jan Clayton
Joe	Kenneth Spencer
Backwoodsman	Howard Frank
Jeb	Duncan Scott
Sal	Pearl Primus
Sam	Laverne Fresnel
Fatima	Jean Reeves
Old Sport	Willie Torpey
Strong Woman	Paula Kaye
Dahomey Queen	Pearl Primus
Ata	Alma Sutton
Male	Claude Marchant
Bora	Talley Beatty
Landlady	Sara Floyd
Ribel	Assefa Marshall
Sister	Sheila Hogan
Mother Superior	Iris Manley
Kim (Child)	Alyce Mace
Jake	Max Showalter
Jim	Jack Daley
Man with Guitar	Thomas Bowman
Doorman at Trocadero	William C. Smith
Lottie	Nancy Kenyon
Dolly	Lydia Fredericks
Sally	Bettina Thayer
Kim (in her twenties)	Jan Clayton
Old Lady on Levee	Frederica Sherman
Jimmy Craig	Charles Tate

Synopsis—Act I—Scene 1: The levee at Natchez on the Mississippi. In the eighties. Scene 2: Kitchen pantry of the "Cotton Blossom." Five minutes later. Scene 3: Auditorium and stage of the "Cotton Blossom." One hour later. Scene 4: Box office, on foredeck. Three weeks later. Scene 5: Auditorium and stage during the third act of "The Parson's Bride" that night. Scene 6: The top deck. Later that night. Scene 7: The levee of Greenville, West sparning. Act II—Scene 1: The Midway Plaisance, Chicago World's Fair, 1893. Scene 2: A room on Ontario Street, 1904. Scene 3: Rehearsal room, Trocadero Music Hall. A few days later. Scene 4: 501, Aretha's Convent. About the same time. Scene 5: Trocadero Music Hall. Just before midnight, New Year's Eve, 1926. Scene 6: Stern of the Show Boat, 1927. Scene 7: Top deck of the "Cotton Blossom." That night. Scene 8: Levee at Greenville. The next night.

The New York Times

JANUARY 7, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Old Man River still rolls along, and "Show Boat" still is one of the real musicals of the modern American stage. As it returned Saturday evening to its original home at the Ziegfeld, its music was unstaled by repetition, its familiar lyrics seemed new. "Ol' Man River" and "Bill" have become all but folk songs since 1927, when the Cotton Blossom first set out for New Orleans, but they are best when heard among friends. Indeed, they are best when heard as a part of the sentimental and gay, the colorful, gaudy, nostalgic affair which is "Show Boat." Knowing a real musical when they have one, the present sponsors have given the American near-classic an excellent production. The arrival of the Cotton Blossom is welcome news.

Since "Show Boat" in its original production and first revival was what it was, there will be comparisons, discussions and disputes all down the line. A week ago Oscar Hammerstein 2d—co-author with the late Jerome Kern—hinted in these pages that colors always seemed brighter in memory, but as a sponsor Mr. Hammerstein has taken no chances. Howard Bay's picturesque settings and Lucinda Ballard's riotously multicolored costumes form a brilliant background for life that could be lived nowhere else than in "Show Boat." The late Florenz Ziegfeld was accustomed to offer lavish displays, but the greater part of the present revival probably could give him pointers. MGM, which likes "Show Boat" also, and offered the backing, must find itself in temporarily reduced circumstances after paying the bills.

To Kenneth Spencer has fallen one of the hardest tasks the theatre has offered since 1927, and one that has grown more difficult through the years. He plays Joe, who sings "Ol' Man River," and he follows Jules Bledsoe and, later, Paul Robeson. On Saturday he wandered onto the stage with his cotton bale, dropped his voice an octave or so below where anyone possibly can sing and went leisurely on his way. He forms the third member of a good trio, and the most familiar song of "Show Boat" is in satisfactory and worthy hands. Carol Bruce also has courage. In what was the late Helen Morgan's role, she sings "Bill." She hasn't the sultry, smoky quality of her predecessor's voice and manner, but she has something of her own, and "Bill" is good, too.

The Magnolia is Jan Clayton, who has moved across town from "Carousel." She is fresh-looking, her voice is clear and she can express the various moods of the part. Her partner, Gaylord Ravenal, is played by Charles Fredericks, the possessor of a good baritone as well as enough of the river gambler's manner. Ralph Dumke gives an interpretation of Captain Andy differing from that of Charles Winninger mainly because of weight differential. Slight and wiry, Mr. Winninger jumped about the stage; several hundred pounds heavier, Mr. Dumke beams about it. A friendly smile is O. K. in "Show Boat." Colette Lyons and Buddy Ebsen play Ellie and Frank, and Ethel Owen is Parthy Ann Hawks. One of the two members of the original cast now present, Francis Mahoney is again Rubber Face and appears to have grown more flexible through the years.

The dancing has been created by Helen Tamiris less in the art of the ballet than in the art of "Show Boat," which is quite practical and wise; and the show has Pearl Primus to do a good deal of it. As the over-all director, Hassard Short keeps his stage in motion, and as the director of the book, Mr. Hammerstein knows what he has written. There can be no denying that the end of the evening is rather fiercely sentimental and that certain other moments could stand a few less lines—but that, again, is "Show Boat." In a program note Mr. Hammerstein tells of a few changes, the most important being the addition of a song written by Mr. Kern a fortnight before his death. It is a light, rollicking number called "Nobody Else But Me."

The Cotton Blossom is tied firmly to the Ziegfeld wharf, and it is nice to have it there.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

DAILY NEWS

JANUARY 7, 1946

'Show Boat' Proves It's Immortal In a Magnificent New Production

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Show Boat" is a musical play in the grand manner. With its Edna Ferber story, its Oscar Hammerstein book and lyrics, its Jerome Kern score, it is what every musical should be—and no other has ever been.

This was proved—to me, at any rate, and I think to an audience which was cheering some of the time and weeping a good bit of the time in sentimental ecstacy—when, last Saturday evening, the new Kern and Hammerstein production of "Show Boat" had its premiere at the Ziegfeld Theatre.

I should like to forget for a moment the production of 1927, and the revival a few years later. I should like to forget the Magnolia of Norma Terris, the Julie of Helen Morgan, the Ravenal of Howard Marsh, the Joe of Jules Bledsoe, the Captain Andy of Charles Winninger, the—well, I should like to forget the whole thing.

Then, having forgotten, I could approach the new "Show Boat" with a wonderful air of ignorance and the delicious conceit of having, all by myself, discovered something remarkable. I could approach it with the same fresh viewpoint which almost a whole new generation of playgoers can have as they go to the Ziegfeld Theatre.

Carol Bruce a Hit.

Having forgotten, I could report that "Show Boat" deserves about every superlative that can be found on a typewriter keyboard. It is, as I've said, a musical play in the grand manner, housed in the perfect theatre for it. As a production it is beautiful, with its Howard Bay sets, and Lucinda Ballard costumes.

As an evening of music it is thrilling, and Edwin McArthur's orchestra is a notable one for a theatre pit. As a group of performances—a job of casting, if you will—it is splendid. Carol Bruce's Julie is memorable, Ralph Dumke's Captain Andy is fetchingly amiable, Jan Clayton's Magnolia is touching, Kenneth Spencer's Joe is admirable—and so on down the line. Down the line through Ethel Owen's Parthy Ann, Buddy Ebsen's Frank, Colette Lyons' Ellie—right on through to Howard Frank's backwoodsman who takes his show boat dramas seriously and wants to shoot the villain.

Fond Memories Return.

In this new "Show Boat" there is distinction—the inspiration of Jerome Kern, the artistic judgment of Oscar Hammerstein, the stage knowledge of Hassard Short, the musical arrangements of Robert Russell Bennett, the good taste and good humor of Mr. Bay and Miss Ballard. And in it, of course, are "Only Make Believe," "Bill," "Ol' Man River," "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "Dahomey" and the rest of the most bountiful score ever put into one musical. There is even a new Kern song, "Nobody Else But Me," which is all right in its place but not remarkable.

But I can't forget the 1927 "Show Boat," of course, because I saw it. I can't forget Morgan and Terris and Winninger, Eva Puck and Sammy White, Bledsoe and all the others from what seems now to have been a golden time. So, naturally, I was among those who were weeping last Saturday night.

I was weeping, not from sadness, but from pleasure. I was glad to see that a new set of actors could dare to step into those roles, and could do well by them. It was quite a thrill to see Miss Bruce climb atop a piano and sing "Bill" just the way it should be sung and as though Helen Morgan hadn't done it. It was fun to discover that Mr. Dumke could explode, "Hap . . . by New Year" so ingratiatingly, and that Charles Fredericks was a splendid Ravenal both in voice and in person.

There is more dancing in this production than there was in the old one, one has heard; and, staged by Helen Tamiris, it is very good, with a group of Negroes headed by Pearl Primus scoring several times.

There were a few physical imperfections in the first public performance, such as an occasional uncertainty in the lighting. But bear in mind that "Show Boat" opened cold, with only a couple of previews behind it—and be confident that a director of Mr. Short's standing will have it running like clockwork.

You who have seen "Show Boat" before—go see it again; see it and live again. You lucky others who have not seen it, and who know it only as a dance set or a radio program—go see it, and discover what it is like to attend a musical play in the grand manner.

"Show Boat"—*continued*

PM Exclusive

JANUARY 7, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

It Just Keeps Rollin' Along

PM Reviews

No, our memories didn't lie. *Show Boat* is great stuff. The years have done very little to it; only here and there, in fact, have they caught up with it. As musicals go, it is full-bodied and full-flavored. The story may be all schmaltz and corn and hokum, full of romantic trappings and sentimental gestures and melodramatic flourishes. But it is all of a piece, and it holds your interest. More than that, it makes way for any amount of picturesque background and shifting period stuff—the color of the old river life, the razzle-dazzle of the Chicago World's Fair, the glitter of the music halls. It gives the scene-designer and costume designer their chance both to dabble in charm and wallow in wonderful bad taste. It gives the choreographer the chance to be gay and spirited, yet retain a cakewalk-and-cancan stylishness. And it gives the past the chance to be floridly nostalgic.

But of course the glory of *Show Boat* always was and always will be its music. Jerome Kern's score was quite possibly the best ever written for a musical comedy; it is certainly the best-wearing. Even *Ol' Man River*, which who hasn't heard at least once a week for the past 18 years, recaptures some of its plaintive sonority when Kenneth Spencer's bass voice first rolls it out. As for *Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man, Only Make Believe, Bill* and *Why Do I Love You*, neither jukeboxes nor dance bands nor my own voice in the bathtub had done them any harm. They are fine songs. Even the songs I'd forgotten are pleasant ones. Unhappily, the one song in the show that doesn't add anything is the new one Mr. Kern had composed before his death.

A few small changes have been made for this production, but the only really noticeable one has come about through time itself. The stuff that was strictly contemporary in 1927 now has a period quality of its own. And for me, so did the music: at least it brought back the '20s, at moments, as all the hurly-burly of *Billion Dollar Baby* did not. The music, by the way, suffers by being rather awkwardly reprised during the last half hour of the show. That last half hour is, in fact, my only kick. Things somehow ran downhill and petered out.

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Though not outstanding, the production is for the most part superior. Howard Bay has got some fun as well as much period color into the sets, and Lucinda Ballard has brightened things with her costumes. Miss Tamiris' dances seem to me, after the music, the best thing in the show. There is nothing the least fancy about them; they are just gay and lively and amusing, but they yet, many of them, have style. Primus, moreover, does some fine solo work.

As for the cast: Jan Clayton's Magnolia cannot have all the wistful charm of her Julie in *Carousel*, but she is right for the part. Charles Fredericks makes an easy, good looking Gay, and has a nice voice. If Ralph Dumke is less than the Capt. Andy of my memory, Buddy Ebsen is more than the Frank: he not only does some good soft-shoe, but he gives the whole show a lift with his personality. And there is Carol Bruce's very handsome Julie. As she sang *Bill*, the ghost of Helen Morgan couldn't help hovering about—for no one, perhaps, more than Miss Bruce. But I thought she sang it well, and so must the rest of the audience. They gave her the ovation of the evening.

—Louis Kronenberger

Journal and American

JANUARY 7, 1946

'Show Boat' Returns To Ziegfeld Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Well, it took the Oscar Hammerstein II-Jerome Kern-Edna Ferber "Show Boat" exactly 18 years and nine days to complete the triumphant round trip from the Ziegfeld Theatre at 6th ave. and 54th st. back to the Ziegfeld Theatre at 6th ave. and 54th st. again.

On the journey it stopped for the most part fortunately at London, Paris, St. Louis, Louisville, Detroit, San Francisco, Dallas, Chicago and the Earl Carroll Casino which, circa 1932, and here in its own home port, stood insecurely where 7th ave. and 50th st. come together.

To honor its current re-docking in what is now practically unknown as The Avenue of the Americas, "Show Boat" has been refurbished from bow to stern by such talented refurbishers as Helen Tamaris, Howard Bay and Lucinda Ballard, beneath the all-over guiding eye of Hassard Short.

The result came 'round the Manhattan bend night before last into the presence of the most cushy of post-war congregations, with the great, the near-great and their manifold admirers mingling beneath the almost visible nostalgia which hung mistily over the town's handsomest auditorium.

You could have cut that almost visible nostalgia with a make-believe knife and cast it from the Ziegfeld out into the Avenue of the Americas. As a matter of fact, by the time the second scene of the first act was up and doing the audience had already done so and "Show Boat" was going to town under its own momentum.

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New Production

Through his agent, the amiable Michael Mok, author-producer-director Hammerstein requests that the "presentation" at the Ziegfeld Theatre be referred to as a "new production" rather than as a "revival." It seems that the word revival carries with it uncalled-for connotations of "warmed-over theatrical fare."

Very well, then...In its new production at Sixth ave. and 54th st., "Show Boat" "continues to suffer from its old "last-act trouble," as its first producer, Florenz Ziegfeld, used to call it. After 18 years and nine days the operetta still starts a story it never really finishes.

From the moment Magnolia Hawks and Gaylord Ravenal are married at the conclusion of the opening stanza the Mississippi River saga hides behind its music and sings its plot around in all directions. A midway, a music hall, a convent, a boarding house, and, at long last, back to the levee again.

After heroine Nollie and hero Gay have sung "Why Do I Love You?" and poor dear Julie has delivered "Bill," the first act songs are reprised one after the familiar other—"Can't Help Lovin' That Man," "Make Believe," "Ol' Man River" and "You Are Love" until "Nobody Else But Me" was brought on to the scene.

This "Nobody Else But Me" is the interpolated number Jerome Kern composed shortly before his death. It is neither good enough for its companion pieces nor a worthy substitute for the imitations with which earlier Magnolias bolstered up the second act saga. But it is Kern!

New Passengers

In the new production of "Show Boat" Jan Clayton is the Magnolia. Prospectively, the erstwhile Julie Jordan of "Carousel" was an unexpected, but perfect, selection for that exacting role. Retrospectively she is but little of the kind. She is not up to it. Not yet, at any rate!

Then, taking them as they appear, Ethel Owen is a directly derivative Parthy Ann; Ralph Dumke is a genial Captain Andy, and Buddy Ebsen is very much himself as the free-and-easy Frank to Colette Lyons' energetic Ellie. Charles Fredericks is the best of all the good-bad Gaylord Ravenals.

My favorites, and the first audience's, as well, in the operetta's new production are the Joe of Kenneth Spencer and the Julie of Carol Bruce. Throughout, each is definitely on the top side. Mr. Spencer's "Ol' Man River" and Miss Bruce's "Bill" are memorable. So are their characterizations.

Pearl Primus and her dancers, especially Laverne French, are tremendously exciting, if not always within the intended "Show Boat" fame. The settings by Howard Bay adorn but do not always fill the Ziegfeld's spacious stage and the costumes by Lucinda Ballard are colorful cartons in her mocking mood.

Beneath the baton of Edwin McArthur, on the well-tempered instruments of the Ziegfeld Theatre Orchestra, in the brilliant orchestrations by Robert Russell Bennett, the immortal Jerome Kern score maintains its magical appeal. It was, it is, it always will be "Show Boat's" crowning glory.

New York World-Telegram

JANUARY 7, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'Show Boat' Still Glorious, in Spots

How I envy those happy people who saw "Show Boat" for the first time Saturday night! With no standards of comparison, they were unrestrained in their enthusiasm. They saw nothing wrong with the musical at all. They had a glorious good time. They wore out their palms in applause. They drained their tear ducts in weeping.

They had much to justify their response. The production is every bit as lavish as the one Flo Ziegfeld gave us in 1927, if not more so. It cost $275,000 to stage. The Gaylord Ravenal of Charles Fredericks is immensely superior to the smug tintype created by Howard Marsh, and Mr. Fredericks has a voice, as well as a personality, of dash, color, warmth and charm. He is all that Ravenal should be: an irresistible weakling, urbane, heroic and gentle in his dastardy.

Spencer Magnificent.

Jules Bledsoe, who wrenched our hearts with "Ol' Man River," is dead now (God rest his soul!) but he has a magnificent successor in Kenneth Spencer, whose low notes are of touching beauty. (Has anyone ever observed that, good a singer as Paul Robeson is, he has never given it the pathos that Bledsoe gave it?) And the management has supplied Mr. Spencer with a chorus of Negro singers (46 of them) who, in tonal technique, compare favorably with the Hall Johnson singers. They are wonderful.

I didn't think that anyone could ever take Helen Morgan's place as Julie. I was wrong about that. Carol Bruce carries the torch with splendor. As she takes her encore, standing forlorn against the cornice of the white proscenium, white lights blazing upon her, she is glorified, sublimely plastered, Patience itself, poignantly smiling at grief. Nor shall I ever forget a little touch—her exit after she has painfully climbed down from the piano, drunk and disorganized, having finished singing "Bill." The droop of her shoulders is death in life; her sag is all we ever need to know of defeat.

I always cry at those scenes where poor Magnolia, deserted by her husband, tries to get a job as a singer and, having got it, almost fails (until Capt. Andy brings her through) at the Trocadero Music Hall, Chicago World's Fair, 1893; but I must say that, otherwise, Jan Clayton was a disappointment. Her speaking voice, flat, nasal and rasping, belies her sweet beauty. She should take voice instruction.

Not a Winninger.

Nobody likes the work of Ralph Dumke better than I do. I have been pounding the drum for him for years, even when he was in flops—and he has been in nothing else. It is not his fault that nobody can ever take the place of Charles Winninger as Capt. Andy.

Mr. Dumke hasn't learned to say, "Happy new year!" the way that Mr. Winninger said it. That was the catch line of the show. For months afterwards, all you had to do was say, "Hap," and hold your breath a minute and say, "py new year!" and you would be considered a droll fellow. . . . Mr. Dumke must be very young; he doesn't know how to say it.

Nor can Mr. Dumke get into the spirit of the thing where Mr. Winninger (rather than refund any money) acts out the missing parts of the show and nearly knocks himself out doing it.

In some other musical I might have liked the cooch dance by a curvaceous young creature, unidentified in the program, or the other dances arranged by Helen Tamaris, in which Alma Sutton, Claude Marchant and Talley Beatty (all Negro) tear the floor of the Ziegfeld to pieces with jitterbug and Lindy-hop stuff. But I can't see what this sort of thing has to do with the sentimental romance of "Show Boat."

Hitherto I have loved Lucinda Ballard (as a costume designer) this side of idolatry. I think I may be excused if I not only dissemble my love but seem, this morning, to kick her downstairs. For I have never seen such garish, preposterous, inappropriate costumes in a musical since "Memphis Bound." And I can't acknowledge that Howard Bay's sets are appropriate either.

The Sun

JANUARY 7, 1946

'Show Boat,' With Kern's Songs, Provides Finest Evening of Broadway Season.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The gallant craft, Cotton Blossom, is again in port and the old Mississippi is still rollin' along; the dashing gambler, Ravenal, is still winning the heart of the lovely Magnolia, and the chanting and melodious folk of the levee are again reminding us that fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly—"Show Boat" has been restored to the New York theater.

It was restored spectacularly Saturday evening, opening at its original home, the Ziegfeld, there on the west side of the Avenue of the Americas, and it provided the finest evening that the current season has brought along to date. "Show Boat" is still magnificent. It was in 1927 and again in 1932, and it always will be.

Here's a musical play with beauty, pathos, nostalgia, panoramic pattern and a Jerome Kern score that will endure for as long as the theater exists. If in this 1946 version of the Kern-Hammerstein-Ferber classic the story now runs down and runs somewhat to patness in its final phases, if portions of the narrative now seem a bit labored and if a few of the present players are not up to the form of their predecessors, these faults are but minor. The Kern music is still overpoweringly beautiful. The production is stunning. Jan Clayton is a fragile and lovely Magnolia, and Carol Bruce, in a role forever to be associated with the melancholy and legendary Helen Morgan, comes through wonderfully.

Saturday evening was Kern's, as it should have been and as Oscar Hammerstein wanted it to be. It is indeed ironic that the late composer of the timeless spiritual, "Ol' Man River," was denied the privilege of being present as his music held a brilliant premiere audience in its spell.

The casting for this 1946 "Show Boat," with two or three exceptions, is fine. Jan Clayton, who continued as the heroine of "Carousel" until just the other day, sings "Only Make Believe" and "Why Do I Love You?" with great tenderness. She dances charmingly and creates the illusion of belonging to the flapper age when, as Kim, she comes forth in a sequence in the Twenties. She also sings the new Kern song, "Nobody Else But Me," written for this new production but not of the standard of the tunes first sung upon that Ziegfeld stage during an amazing December week in 1927.

Carol Bruce does remarkably well as Julie, proving her right to the part with "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" and later, climbing to the piano top and evoking memories of the deep-throated and poignant Helen Morgan, singing "Bill," beautifully and heartbreakingly. Kenneth Spencer is the riverman, Joe, and he does "Ol' Man River," first given us by Jules Bledsoe and later by an inspired Paul Robeson, splendidly. Charles Fredericks, as Gaylord Ravenal, is excellent and has the looks and the apparel of a glamorous Cameo Kirby, created by Tarkington in the long ago.

There is good fun from Colette Lyons and Buddy Ebsen, playing the comedy team of Ellie and Frank. Frank Mahoney is back in his original part of Rubber Face. Pearl Primus contributes some enormously exciting dancing.

The two players from the original production I greatly miss are Charles Winninger, with his unctuous playing and caperings in the role of Captain Andy, now done by Ralph Dumke, and Edna May Oliver as the acidulous, sour, shrewish Parthy Ann, one of the finest characters written by Edna Ferber into her novel. The role is currently played by Ethel Owen.

This new "Show Boat" production has color and vitality. It is first-rate in its ensemble levee singing and in its fast dances, directed by Helen Tamiris. Lucinda Ballard's costumes are striking and so are the settings of Howard Bay, if lacking something of the lush splendor of Joseph Urban's original designs. Edwin McArthur is a masterful musical director. Hassard Short has contributed his taste and skill to the general staging.

"Show Boat," a timeless memorial to the genius of Jerome Kern, is now, nineteen years after its original presentation, the best buy in the theater of New York. The town is in the debt of Oscar Hammerstein for bringing it back.

"Show Boat"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JANUARY 7, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Miraculous Make-Believe

THE greatest of American musical comedies has been revived at the Ziegfeld and it is a joy to hear and to behold. After nearly twenty years "Show Boat" has lost none of its melodic magnificence, its dramatic excitement and its abiding humor. Since this latter-day production is munificently mounted and staged with affectionate know-how, it is a privilege as well as a great treat to attend the celebrated classic. The late Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein 2d did on inspired job in 1927. It is still full of inspiration and delight. Several of the performances may seem a bit faltering to greybeards who saw the original, while the three hours of stage action is overly long by contemporary song and dance standards, but "Show Boat" remains a miraculous musical entertainment.

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Before his death the composer added a new song to the score. It is a piece called "Nobody Else But Me." The greatest tribunte one can pay it is to say that it is in the running with its companion pieces. Such hardy perennials as "Only Make Believe," "Ol' Man River," "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "Why Do I Love You?," "Bill" or the lovely and less familiar "You Are Love" certainly constituted a prodigal score for any musical comedy. They are all played superbly under Edwin McArthur's direction at the Ziegfeld. The make a rich musical line through a show in which song and dramatic substance are most felicitously blended.

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Hammerstein notes in the program that "Mr. Kern and I have kept the libretto and score of 'Show Boat' substantially as they were when originally written in 1927." It was a wise move. The stuff of Edna Ferber's book spreads across the last decades of the last century with the same melodramatic urgency and comic relief that it had in the first showing of the work. The fate of the show boat captain's daughter, Magnolia and her gambler husband, the threnody of Joe, as he sings of Negroes and ol' man river, the tortured torch song of Julie and the turbulent growing up of a generation of Mississippi River folk give a multitude of facets to the libretto. The finale in 1927 is something of a lampoon today, but it merely adds to the general galety.

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Of the present performers, three are downright splendid. Kenneth Spencer's handling of the famous Negro role is electric. Ralph Dumke, as Captain Andy, is casually amusing and becomes superbly funny in the scene on the show boat where he has to double for several members of a missing cast. And Charles Fredericks, as the happy-go-lucky gambler, matches fine singing with fine acting. One might have wished for more vocal accomplishments from Jan Clayton, as Magnolia and Carol Bruce, in the Julie part, but they act effectively, particularly the latter. Buddy Ebsen is in there on the dancing end and Pearl Primus and Laverne French are close to sensational in the Negro stomp numbers.

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"Show Boat" has, as you may remember, a large cast. There are excellent minor impersonations in the current revival by Helen Dowdy, Ethel Owen, Colette Lyons, Francis Mahoney and too many others to mention. Hassard Short's over-all staging is spectacularly restrained; the Helen Tamiris dances are cunningly conceived; Howard Bay's settings are ingenious and Lucinda Ballard has dreamed up some exceedingly fancy costumes for a series of bygone eras. "Show Boat" represents American musical comedy at the top of its form. It is good to have it back on Broadway again

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